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ABSTRACT

The current status of student government's role in the school decision making of a New York junior high school is examined in this case study. The student body, faculty, and administration responded to a 37-item questionnaire which examined their attitudes toward student government activities and importance in school decision making. The results indicate that a majority of the students and faculty felt that students were not involved in the decision-making process even though the prinicipal felt that they were. Students were disenchanted with the performance of the student council, did not feel that the council solicited their opinions, and did not think that the council served as a link between the students and the administration. While activities to increase student input into student council activities were initiated, efforts at increasing student input into the decision-making process met with little response from the administration even though the principal agreed to meet with council representatives every two weeks. (Author/DE)

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A CASE STUDY OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL

William J. Mac Kenzie

William C. Elwell

00002

CHAPTER I - NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

This case study was carried out over a prolonged period of time during the school year 1974-75. The Middle School which is the central subject of this paper is located in an upper-middle class suburb of Rochester, New York. The school has a student population of 750, and goes from grade 5 to grade 8. There are, at this time 53 full time and part time faculty members. The administration consists of a principal and a vice principal. Two guidance counselors are also part of the full time professional staff.

The major thrust of this paper will be one of original data gathering and analysis. It will reflect the present status of the student government at the school. There will be a set of recommendations included at the conclusion of the paper which will be presented to the school adminintration for their consideration, and hopefully for their adoption.

No paper of this kind can be truly complete without the inclusion of some related literature in the field. The inclusion of this research is intended to give the reader a clearer understanding of the problem. There are many aspects to the study of student government and its relationship to student involvement in the decision making process in schools. Others more eminently qualified than me have presented their arguments in a forceful and convincing manner and I present them to you for your considerations.

Statement of the Problem

I will identify suggested areas of student involvement in the decision making process in schools.

These suggested areas of student involvement will be identified through recommendations from related literature in the field of student government. The following questions will be asked of the students, faculty and the administrator. Do the Twelve Corners Middle School students believe that they are involved in the decision making process? Does the Twelve Corners Middle School faculty believe the students are involved in the decision making process? Does the administrator of Twelve Corners Middle School believe the students are involved in the decision making process?

As a result of this study I will formulate a set of recommendations concerning student government involvement in the decision making process.

REASONS FOR THE STUDY

I initiated the study to assess the current status of the student government at the middle school. As the new advisor to the student council I wanted to learn the opinions of the students, faculty and administration on a variety of issues and felt that the information would be helpful to me, as the previous advisor retired and left the community to live in another state. Without the guiding hand of someone who had done the job before, I decided to make a new beginning for myself. The survey was one of my first acts as the new advisor. It was met with a great deal of enthusiasm. Teachers, students and the principal responded to it promptly.

Soon after I took over the student council I discovered some serious problems. It seemed as though there was a great deal of apathy on the part of the seventh and eighth grade students and teacher participation in council activities was very low. Also, there were many complaints from students about the time council meetings were being held. Some of the leaders of the council felt that they were not accomplishing much, and were at loggerheads with the principal over several issues. I began to think that the voices of complaint that I was hearing were not just coming from the vocal few. In order to have a greater understanding of the problem I decided to initiate a survey to solicit the opinions of the students, faculty and administration.

From an analysis of the data collected I will make up a list of recommendations which will be presented to both the principal and the student council for their consideration. It is hoped by me, that these recommendations, if adopted, will help make this a more effective student government.

00007

CHAPTER II - REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Perhaps the term 'student government' is not quite the proper choice of words for the organization that will be examined in this paper. In most cases students do not really govern anything.

Responsibility for operation of our schools rests in the hands of citizens of local districts, who select a small group from among their number to represent them in educational matters. This group, commonly called the school board, in turn chooses a professional educator (superintendent) as its executive officer.

Responsible for the total program of a particular school within the district is the principal. He may delegate certain functions to others - teachers, guidance counselors, and secretaries but rarely if ever to students.[1]

What then is the purpose of having a student government at all? If state laws, the school board, the superintendent and the principal have ultimate responsibility what room is left for the student government?

The National Association of Secondary School Principals in its publication of the Student Government Handbook, tries to answer that very question. They identify the general purposes of a student government (or council) as the following:

1. to promote the general welfare of the school
2. to foster, promote, and develop democracy as a way of life.
3. to teach home, school and community citizenship

1 George Mathers, "The Student Council a Vital Force?", The Student Government Handbook (Washington, D. C.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1967) p 116

4. to provide school experiences closely related to life experiences

5. to provide learning opportunities through the solution of problems which are of interest and concern to students

6. to provide training and experience in representative democracy

7. to contribute to the total educational growth of boys and girls. [2]

In addition they suggest that each student government (or council) identify specific goals it hopes to work toward. They offer the following as examples of what some specific goals might be:

1. maintaining desirable standards of school spirit, student morale, and community pride

2. encouraging high standards of scholarship

3. providing a means for students to express their feelings and opinions

4. sponsoring social and recreational activities

5. conducting student council campaigns, elections and installations

6. promoting desirable student behavior at school and in the community.

7. perpetuating school traditions and customs

8. encouraging neatness and cleanliness of buildings and grounds

9. raising funds for charitable, welfare and health agencies. [3]

One item found lacking in the recommendations made by the National Association of Secondary School Principals is the role of the student government in curriculum planning, development and implementation. The overall view which permeates this literature is student government as a sort of social fraternity of students dedicated to the advancement of school spirit and harmony with the community.

2 Ibid
3 Ibid

Without exception all of the authors of the various resource materials read agreed that students should have some kind of role in the decision making process in schools. Most of them relegated these decisions to ones governing the activities program, while a few, such as Romeo Marquis, Ronald Gross, Paul Osterman, Kimball Wiles and Harl Douglass felt that the students' role in the decision making process was more than one of supervising the activities program.

Douglass suggests that students be actively involved in faculty discussions offering both observations and conclusions.

Kimball Wiles said, "..When people are left out of the decision making process, they know they have little responsibility for what happens." Perhaps by bringing students into the decision making process we can produce an atmosphere which is more highly productive.

Gross and Osterman said that, "..students must be given the ability to exercise control over what happens to them at school." They suggested that students formulate their own goals, and implement courses of study.

Maine principal, Romeo Marquis, saw students in the position of developing curriculum in a cooperative atmosphere with faculty and administration.

Perhaps more representative of the traditional opinion of the students' role in the decision making process was expressed early in this chapter by Robbins and Williams in the goals of a student council as adopted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in their Student Government

Handbook. Some of the goals mentioned included the maintaining of a desirable school spirit and the sponsoring of social and recreational activities. R. P. Brimm reinforced this more traditional opinion by saying, "..the reason for forming a student government is to meet certain adolescent needs." He went on to say that the student government meets these needs through its sponsorship of the activities program in the school.

Dr. Frederick called the student activities program,"the third curriculum." He said, "at the heart of the activities program is the student government." He saw the decision making role of the student council as follows: "..the decision making responsibilities of the student council should be restricted to the non-credit curriculum or student activities."

Hopefully this background information will help in understanding more fully why the particular questions in this survey were made. Also, it helped in the formulation of certain conclusions which are included in Chapter V as part of the recommendations to the school administration.

Robert L. Buser, Professor of Education at Southern Illinois University, in his article entitled, "Student Activities in Schools of the Seventies" which appeared in a bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals adds some more suggestions. The suggestions included in his article are a result of a survey that he took in 100 schools in 25 states. Among some of these suggestions are the following:

1. Clubs, Councils and Seminars on
   a) ecology
   b) peace
   c) racial heritage
   d) world affairs

2. School-Community Service Groups
   a) to serve home for the aged
   b) voter registration
   c) clean-up and anti-pollution days
   d) tutoring services

3. Student participation in governing school
   a) student-faculty grievance committee
   b) student representation on the board of education
   c) senior administration day
   d) liberalized role for the student newspaper. [4]

He seems to concede that students do have a limited role to play in the decision making process in schools today. This is in contrast to the official position expressed earlier of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Professor Buser apparently sees the student government as an advisory body both at the building level and the district level.

The third article that is previewed comes from the bulletin by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and was written by a high school principal from Presque, Maine.

4 Robert L. Buser, "Student Activities in Schools of the Seventies", (The Bulletin Of the NASSP, LV, Sept. 1971 pp 1-9

The principal, Romeo Marquis, discusses how students can be involved in curriculum development. He says that the principal who wishes to consider student involvement in curriculum matters must first come to grip with three basic premises:

1. Curriculum development is not an exclusive function of teachers and administrators.
2. High school students are relatively well versed in curriculum matters
3. Student involvement in curriculum development does not mean that students will eventually dictate what is to be taught and how to meet those premises.

He categorized student involvement in the following manner:

1. Ad hoc curriculum committees
2. School-Community Council
3. Student Council on inter-staff relationships
4. Student Council on instructional technology
   a) to deal with the planning of curriculum design. [5]

Mr. Marquis does admit that there is some justification for student input into the decision making process in schools. In fact, he does produce the mechanics for such a program, but it is not the students who will make the final decisions; that still rests with the administration.

So far heavy emphasis on the role of the student government in the decision making process in schools has been made. The student government may not be the only available means of student expression for often it can be the individual student who is influencing the decision making process more than any formal student

5 Romeo Marquis, "Curriculum Development: Can Students be Involved?", (The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, LVII, May 1973) pp 127-131

organization.

Various authors in recent publications have advocated "open" and freer" schools with the students and the educational "establishment" sharing the power. Such a book is High School, edited by Ronald Gross and Paul Osterman. The predominant philosophical statement expressed or implied throughout the book is the following "..students must be given the ability to exercise control over what happens to them at school, more specifically: 1) students should have the right to go on independent study at anytime, 2) students should have the right to formulate their own goals and how they best can go about achieving them, 3) students should have input into teacher evaluations, 4) students must be given access to their own files and have control over who can and who cannot see them, and 5) students have the right to have the freedom to decide what they want to print in student newspapers, literary magazines and yearbooks. Censorship by sponsors, principals, whatever the degree of subtlety must not be allowed.[6]

The model that is proposed in High School perhaps may be far off in the future in the more traditional districts in our country. The sharing of responsibilities for administration of the school may frighten many principals. Far too many of them are used to operating in an atmosphere of benevolent autocracy, supported by community, school board and superintendent. The role designed for a student government by the authors of High School is then perhaps quite unique. It does not represent the majority opinion.

6 Ronald Gross and Paul Osterman, High School (New York: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 1971), p 133

R. P. Brimm in his book Junior High School says that the reason for forming a student government which he defines as the core of the activities is to meet certain adolescent needs. In meeting these needs the student government (or activities program) should be an integral part of the overall school program. He says that it "provides experiences in exploration, integration and guidance, differentiated opportunities in accordance with individual abilities, and talents; also it facilitates socialization and aids in articulation."[7] He also contends that the student government can foster a favorable atmosphere where faculty and administration work cooperatively with pupils in extra-class activities. In addition, as a result of the activities program students receive recognition and rewards for achievements which is satisfying psychologically for them. In the long run the students are satisfying their greatest need in adolescence - the need for peer acceptance and companionship.[8]

Dr. Robert Frederick, Professor of Education, State University of New York at Albany, calls student activities the "third curriculum." At the heart of the student activities program is the student government. He says that student councils are part of education for citizenship which includes the learning of the following: responsibility, initiative, leadership, fellowship,

7 R. P. Brimm, The Junior High School (New York: The Center For Applied Research, Inc., 1971) pp 282-283.
8 Ibid.

00016

respect for law and order, honesty and obedience to law. He feels that the decision making responsibilities of the student council should be restricted to the non-credit curriculum or student activities. [9]

Nellie Thompson in her book on student government puts it this way:

> "Modern education has an around the clock interest in the development of young people. The strictly academic curriculum fails in fundamental ways to satisfy the needs of youth. A broader philosophy of education accepts the total development of young people, helping them to a greater extent in finding themselves in relationship to the world around them.
>
> The activities program has become, in effect, a laboratory for improving human relationships as well as furthering the curricular program. The student activities program satisfies the need of youth, so pressing at the junior and senior high school age, to identify their personal interests with group interests and to know the sense of security which comes from belonging to a group.
>
> The student government (and or clubs) provides the opportunity for young people to choose and explore problems in which they are interested. It encourages and helps young people to do their own thinking, reach decisions, learn self-discipline, grow in respect for and understanding of others and develop qualities of leadership." [10]

There are numerous obstacles thrown in the path of student government which prevent the student council from functioning to its maximum capacity. In the book, Allied Activities in the Secondary School, the authors identify five major factors as

9 Robert W. Frederick, Student Activities in American Education (New York: The Center For Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1965) p 10

10 Nellie Z. Thompson, Your School Clubs (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1967) p 7

obstacles which prevent the successful functioning of the student government. They are: too many restrictions placed on the council; pupils are made the marionettes of the faculty; adequate time within the school day is not set aside for council meetings; pupils are asked to do the 'dirty work' which the faculty does not wish to tackle; and too much authority is delegated to the pupils. [11]

The authors state that, "..the term pupil-self government is a misnomer because it is impossible from both the standpoint of legality and maturity of the pupils to give them the implied power, the council should not attempt to take over the school. Since the council derives its powers from the authority delegated to it by the principal, such authority can always be recalled by him." [12]

What then is the responsibility of the student government? Kimball Wiles in his book, The Changing Curriculum of the American High School says that the student government should have the responsibility for developing policies concerning the operation of the activities program and formulation of regulations concerning student behavior.

He feels that students should have a role in the decision making process in schools. He says that, "If many decisions are shared with students, they assume a responsibility for the program and have concrete evidence that the faculty is concerned with helping them become more mature people." Conversely he says that, "..when people are left out of the decision making

11 Louis Kilzer, et al, Allied Activities in the Secondary School (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1956) pp 146-147
12 Ibid, p 168

process, they know that they have little responsibility for what happens. If students feel that they are only to advise and do not have a real part in decision making they soon learn that student government is only a tool of the administration and faculty. When they reach this conclusion, the student government ceases to be a vital force in the life of the school." [13]

Harl Douglass in his book, The High School Curriculum says that, "The student council should be employed to advise the faculty in a considerable number of areas and sit in upon discussions of such problems and given conclusions and observations, as do the teachers." Douglass then foresees the student council as being actively involved in the decision making process in schools. This is in very close concert with the way Kimball Wiles perceives the role of the student government to be.

Douglass ends by saying, "Through their involvement in activities, students gain insights into the problems in the application of the principles of self government and representative democracy in actual situations. The development of a sensitivity to some of the problems encountered in human relations in a free society and a valuable training in good citizenship." [14]

Presented here was a review of a limited number of books and articles written on the role of student government in the decision making process in schools. The articles included in this chapter were representative of many others which if they too were included would have made much of what you have read more repetitive.

13 Kimball Wiles, The Changing Curriculum of the American High School (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) pp 205-206

14 Harl R. Douglass, The High School Curriculum (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1964) p 523-24.

00019

CHAPTER III - METHODS AND PROCEDURE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this investigation was to determine student, faculty, and administration responses to selected questions dealing with the operation of the student government at a particular middle school.

This chapter is primarily concerned with the procedures used to gather the necessary data. First, the sample population is described. Secondly, the construction of the measuring device is discussed. A description of the administration and scoring of the measuring device is also included.

Population

All the students in this study attend the same middle school. It is one of two middle schools (grades 5-8) that serves a community of approximately 4,400. The community in which the school is located is an upper middle class suburb. District students have consistently scored higher on standardized tests than any other school district in the same county.

The teachers of these students have a wide range of teaching experience and training. The school, and the district as a whole has a low turn over rate. More that 85% of the teachers employed at this school are on tenure. All the teachers had their B.S. or equivalent degree and slightly over 60% have received an M.S. or its equivalent.

The principal of the school involved in this study gave approval for the study in November 1974. The agreement with the principal included only two provisions:

1. No mention of the names of the school, students, or teachers involved would be made,
2. The faculty approve of such a study.

Social studies teachers in the school were designated as administrators of the measuring device to the students. A 25 minute briefing with them to discuss the objective, explain the questions and pass out question sheets and IBM score sheets was held. They administered the measuring device to each of their own social studies classes on one day.

I administered the measuring device to the faculty. It was done at one time and administered to all the faculty members.

I delivered the principal's copy personally. I briefed him in the same manner as noted above. He spent five minutes on it and returned it to me immediately.

CHAPTER IV - ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

TABLE ONE

William MacKenzie Feb. 26, 1975

Faculty Responses to Survey Questions

Question Number	Response 1 Total	Response 1 Percent	Response 2 Total	Response 2 Percent	Response 3 Total	Response 3 Percent
1	45	91.8	2	4.0	2	4.0
2	19	38.7	16	32.6	12	24.4
3	18	36.7	20	40.8	11	22.4
4	19	38.7	15	30.6	13	26.5
5	41	83.6	5	10.2	3	6.1
6	29	59.1	12	24.4	8	16.3
7	40	81.6	8	16.3	1	2.0
8	13	26.5	31	63.2	4	8.1
9	14	28.5	25	51.0	8	16.3
10	15	30.6	29	59.1	4	8.1
11	10	20.4	28	57.1	10	20.4
12	15	30.6	14	28.5	20	40.8
13	12	24.4	6	12.2	30	61.2
14	13	26.5	6	12.2	29	59.1
15	9	18.3	9	18.3	8	16.3
16	44	89.7	1	2.0	3	6.1
17	30	61.2	9	18.3	8	16.3
18	21	42.8	16	32.6	9	18.3
19	27	55.1	10	20.4	11	22.4
20	34	69.3	3	6.1	10	20.4
21	23	46.9	15	30.6	9	18.3
22	7	14.2	28	57.1	12	24.4
23	14	28.5	20	40.8	13	26.5
24	25	51.0	10	20.4	11	22.4
25	5	10.2	20	40.8	20	40.8
26	2	4.0	11	22.4	2	4.0
27	21	42.8	20	40.8	8	16.3
28	9	18.3	22	44.8	16	32.6
29	21	42.8	18	36.7	10	20.4
30	26	53.0	16	32.6	7	14.2
31	5	10.2	11	22.4	32	65.3
32	4	8.1	10	20.4	34	69.3
33	18	36.7	17	34.6	12	24.4
34	23	46.9	18	36.7	7	14.2
35	9	18.3	28	57.1	11	22.4
36	31	63.2	6	12.2	8	16.3
37	1	2.0	3	6.1	1	2.0

00024

TABLE TWO

William MacKenzie Feb. 26, 1975

4th and 5th grade Responses to Survey

Question Number	Response 1 Total	Response 1 Percent	Response 2 Total	Response 2 Percent	Response 3 Total	Response 3 Percent
1	298	82.3	48	13.2	15	4.1
2	145	40.0	149	41.1	68	18.7
3	98	27.0	217	59.9	47	12.9
4	110	30.3	140	38.6	112	30.9
5	225	62.1	100	27.6	37	10.2
6	176	48.6	122	33.7	63	17.4
7	235	64.9	89	24.5	38	10.4
8	98	27.0	218	60.2	44	12.1
9	120	33.1	199	54.9	42	11.6
10	100	27.6	221	61.0	40	11.0
11	101	27.9	193	53.3	67	18.5
12	106	29.2	94	25.9	161	44.4
13	56	15.4	57	15.7	248	68.5
14	68	18.7	63	17.4	230	63.5
15	111	30.6	145	40.0	87	24.0
16	271	74.8	37	10.2	53	14.6
17	102	28.1	187	51.6	69	19.0
18	84	23.2	157	43.3	118	32.5
19	115	31.7	147	40.6	96	26.5
20	136	37.5	107	29.5	116	32.0
21	210	58.0	80	22.0	69	19.0
22	48	13.2	157	43.3	152	41.9
23	52	14.3	141	38.9	165	45.5
24	242	66.8	62	17.1	55	15.1
25	76	20.9	127	35.0	155	42.8
26	66	18.2	194	53.5	84	23.2
27	161	44.4	129	35.6	66	18.2
28	165	45.5	119	32.8	73	20.1
29	169	46.6	129	35.6	60	16.5
30	218	60.2	77	21.2	61	16.8
31	86	23.7	108	29.8	161	44.4
32	104	28.7	105	29.0	145	40.0
33	170	46.9	119	32.8	66	18.2
34	207	57.1	93	25.6	54	14.9
35	83	22.9	158	43.6	108	29.8
36	171	47.2	101	27.9	73	20.1
37	8	2.2	20	5.5	17	4.6

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TABLE THREE

William MacKenzie Feb. 26, 1975 — 5th and 6th grades Responses to Survey Questions .

Question Number	Response 1 Total	Response 1 Percent	Response 2 Total	Response 2 Percent	Response 3 Total	Response 3 Percent
1	321	90.4	14	3.9	20	5.6
2	215	60.5	54	15.2	86	24.2
3	171	48.1	120	33.8	63	17.7
4	160	45.0	68	19.1	123	34.6
5	243	68.4	69	19.4	40	11.2
6	200	56.3	97	27.3	57	16.0
7	160	45.0	154	43.3	40	11.2
8	172	48.4	146	41.1	36	10.1
9	102	28.7	220	61.9	32	9.0
10	130	36.6	176	49.5	47	13.2
11	116	32.6	179	50.4	57	16.0
12	121	34.0	47	13.2	185	52.1
13	76	21.4	37	10.4	238	67.0
14	106	29.8	33	9.2	213	59.9
15	103	29.0	211	59.4	39	10.9
16	259	72.9	32	9.0	61	17.1
17	108	30.4	139	39.1	107	30.1
18	121	34.0	84	23.6	149	41.9
19	127	35.7	91	25.6	136	38.3
20	72	20.2	110	30.9	170	47.8
21	196	55.2	55	15.4	103	29.0
22	60	16.9	123	34.6	171	48.1
23	52	14.6	133	37.4	167	47.0
24	230	64.7	27	7.6	93	26.1
25	101	28.4	85	23.9	168	47.3
26	37	10.4	255	71.8	63	17.7
27	104	29.2	155	43.6	95	26.7
28	101	28.4	174	49.0	79	22.2
29	155	43.6	126	35.4	72	20.2
30	169	47.6	106	29.8	79	22.2
31	66	18.5	117	32.9	171	48.1
32	80	22.5	120	33.8	154	43.3
33	121	34.0	152	42.8	79	22.2
34	190	53.5	109	30.7	53	14.9
35	92	25.9	166	46.7	94	26.4
36	176	49.5	110	30.9	65	18.3
37	49	13.8	205	57.7	86	24.2

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TABLE FOUR

Principal's Response to Items

1. Yes
2. Don't Know
3. No
4. Yes
5. Yes
6. Yes
7. No
8. Yes
9. No
10. Yes
11. Yes
12. No
13. Yes
14. Yes
15. No Response (Void)
16. Yes
17. Yes
18. Yes
19. Yes
20. Yes
21. Yes
22. No
23. Yes
24. Yes
25. No
26. No Response (Void)
27. No
28. No
29. Yes
30. Yes
31. No
32. No
33. Yes
34. Don't Know
35. No
36. No
37. No Response (Void)

22000

TABLE FIVE

Faculty Responses Which Differ From Students By More Than 15% (Yes's)

Items	5th - 6th Graders	(%)	7th - 8th Graders	(%)
1				
2	X	21.8		
3				
4				
5	X	15.2	X	21.5
6				
7	X	36.6	X	16.7
8	X	21.9		
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16	X	16.8		
17				
18				
19			X	19.6
20	X	19.4	X	23.4
	X	49.1		

00028

Faculty Responses Which Differ From Students By More Than 15% (Yes's)

Items	5th - 6th Graders	(%)	7th - 8th Graders	(%)
21				
22				
23				
24				
25				
26	X	18.2	X	15.8
27				
28				
29				
30			X	27.2
31				
32				
33			X	18.5
34			X	20.6
35				
36				
37				

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TABLE SIX

5th-6th Grade Students Responses Which Differ From the 7th-8th Graders by More Than 15% (Yes's)

Item	7th - 8th Grade	(%)
1		
2	X	20.5
3	X	21.1
4		
5		
6		
7	X	19.9
8	X	21.4
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20	X	17.3

00030

5th-6th Grade Students Responses Which Differ From the 7th-8th Graders By More Than 15% (Yes's)

Item	7th - 8th Grade	(%)
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		
26		
27	X	15.2
28	X	17.1
29		
30		
31		
32		
33		
34		
35		
36		
37		

00031

In analyzing this data it should be pointed out that this was a preliminary study which could eventually lead into a more definitive research assignment. Eventually the data collected may help to improve the structure of the student government at this school.

Differences of 15% or more between faculty-student responses and between fifth and sixth graders and seventh and eighth graders were identified for analysis. Fifteen percent was selected because most differences were much less than this figure or fifteen percent and more. No attempt was made to determine statistically significant differences as this is a preliminary study to help this school look at its student government.

Out of this analysis will come a list of recommendations that will be made to the school principal and to the student council. They will be able to view data from each other for the first time and make decisions based on more than just "guess work."

Comments on responses from faculty which differ significantly from those of students

A comparison of the responses from the fifth and sixth graders and the faculty for item 2 is quite interesting. In answering the question, "Our student council deals with important issues," only 38.7% of the faculty agreed, whereas 60.5% of the fifth and sixth thought that the student council dealt with important issues. The difference of 21.8% points may be due to the difference in interpretation of the meaning of the term, important. What may be a high priority

issue for an adult faculty member may have a low standing with a 10 or 11 year old.

The faculty overwhelmingly (83.6%) said they were interested in student council activities but they apparently do not think the council deals with important issues.

A vast majority of the faculty (81.6%) thinks that student council meetings should be held during the school day while less than half of the students feel that student council meetings should be held during the regular scheduled school day. There needs to be some discussion on this point to find out the reasons, why the two groups differ so greatly.

Item number 19 states that, "Student council serves as a link between students and administrators". By a slim majority, 55.1% of the faculty feels that the student council serves as a link with the administration. It should be pointed out that the building principal checked yes to this question. The students did not feel that this was true as fifth and sixth graders and seventh and eighth gave a relatively low score to this point (31.7% and 35.7% respectively). In order to reach any kind of conclusions about this data further research is needed.

In answer to the question, "Student council gives to charities", the faculty responded with a 69.3% positive rating as compared to the relatively low positive rating given by the fifth and sixth graders, in fact 47.8% of them responded that they didn't know. This may be due to their being new to the school and not having participated in various fund raising drives. This indicates a better job of publicizing charitable activities of the student council is needed.

00033

Only 18.3% of the students thought that the principal was apathetic towards the student council, whereas 45.5% of the faculty thought that the principal was apathetic towards the council. More study is needed to find out why so many more faculty members thought the principal was apathetic towards the student council.

For items 31 and 32 there were a large number of students who did not know whether the superintendent and the school board were obstacles to student involvement in the decision making process or not, (seventh and eighth graders 48.1% and 43.3% respectively, and from the fifth and sixth graders a 44% and 40%.)

Comments on 5th and 6th graders responses which differ significantly from 7th and 8th graders

In response to item number 2, "Out student council deals with important issues", 40% of the seventh and eighth graders responded positively, whereas 60% of the fifth and sixth graders responded favorably. Perhaps over a four year period in the middle school the students change their minds over what constitutes important issues.

The rather low positive response to item number 3 by the seventh and eighth graders is interesting. Only 27% of them seemed to be satisfied with the student council while 48.1% of the fifth and sixth graders indicated satisfaction with the student council. In other words, a little more than one fourth of the seventh and eighth graders are satisfied with the council's performance and less than half of the fifth and sixth graders.

More seventh and eighth graders (64.9%) than fifth and sixth graders (45%) felt that the student council should meet during the regular school day. This is a difference of 19.9%.

Only 29.2% of the fifth and sixth graders view teachers as being apathetic towards the student council. This figure raises to 44.4% at the seventh and eighth grade. Apparently something happens in those three or four years to change the minds of the students towards this point. A possible explanation of this might be that more fifth and sixth grade teachers are actively involved in student government.

Fifth and sixth graders view the principal as not being apathetic towards the council (29.2%). On the other hand, 44.4% of the seventh and eighth graders view the principal as being apathetic towards the council. In both cases a majority of the students do feel that the prinicpal is not apathetic towards the council. No remarks were made to me by the students in answer to this question. The building principal in this response to this question said that he was not apathetic towards the council.

CHAPTER V - SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine student, faculty and administration viewpoints on various questions related to student involvement in the decision making process. The data will be used to inform students, faculty and administration about each others' viewpoints. A set of recommendations was formulated from the data. The data collected will also serve as a basis for a more definitive research assignment sometime in the future.

The sample

Seven hundred and sixteen students, forty nine faculty members and one administrator participated in this study. This was a limited case study; no attempt was made here to make generalizations from the sample tested to any other population.

The method

A questionnaire containing 37 items, which was designed by the Department of Research and Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia was used. Responses to the questionnaire were recorded on I.B.M. scoring sheets. For purposes of analysis the groups used were, 361 seventh and eighth graders,

The Findings

There were some differences between each of the groups. In the case of the, "Faculty responses which differ from students by more than 15% (yes's)", there were 13 items on the survey where there was a difference of 15% or greater. The fifth and sixth graders differed from the seventh and eighth graders by more than 15% on 7 items from the survey.

A Few Concluding Remarks on The Questions Presented in the, "Statement of the Problem."

1. In response to the first question, "Do the Twelve Corners Middle School students believe they are involved in the decision making process?", the answer is no. 53.3% of the seventh and eighth graders felt that they are not involved in the decision making process and 50.4% of the fifth and sixth graders felt that they are not involved in the decision making process. (Item 11).

2. A majority of the faculty (57.1%) agreed with the students that they are not involved in the decision making process. (Item 11).

3. In contrast to this the principal felt that the students are involved in the decision making process. But, he said that he did not want them involved in the decision making process. (Item 12).

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CONCLUSIONS *

1. Students do not feel that they have a voice in the decision making process. (survey item 11).
2. Seventh and eighth graders are disenchanted with the performance of the student council (survey item 3).
3. The faculty has expressed a high interest in the activities of the student council (survey item 5).
4. The principal expressed a high interest in the activities of the student council (survey item 5).
5. The faculty feels that the student council solicits students opinions (survey item 17).
6. The students do not feel that the council solicits student's opinions (survey item 17)
7. The faculty and the students do not feel the principal wants the students involved in the dicision making process (survey item 12).
8. The principal does not want the students involved in the decision making process (survey item 12).
9. The faculty feels that the council serves as a link between the students and administration (survey item 19).
10. The students do not feel that the council serves as a link between the students and the administration (survey item 19).
11. Seventh and eighth graders think that teachers are apathetic towards the council (survey item 27).
12. Fifth and sixth graders do not think the teachers are apathetic towards the council (survey item 27).

CONCLUSIONS *

13. Students do not think the principal is apathetic towards the activities of the council (survey item 28).

14. The principal says that he is not apathetic towards the activities of the council (survey item 28).

* Conclusions based on a majority of yes responses to the items indicated.

The principal's responses come from his survey

Further Research is Needed

Item 2 - Our student council deals with important issues.

Item 3 - I am satisfied with our student council.

Item 7 - The student council should meet during school hours.

Item 27 - Teacher apathy is an obstacle to student involvement in the decision making process.

Item 28 - The principal's apathy is an obstacle to student involvement in the decision making process.

* Further research is needed based on my comments contained in the section on the analysis of the data collected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Discussion should be initiated in order to decide on the best time to hold council meetings. The principal and the teaching staff should be consulted before a decision is made. (item 7,8)
2. A memo should be distributed to the faculty and the student body informing them of the various charities that the student council gives to. (item 20)
3. A priority rating should be given to the items that the council deals with. They should be ranked in order of importance. This will show what issues the council feels are important. (item 2)
4. The student council president and the advisor should meet on a regular basis with the principal. The purpose of these meetings would be to open up lines of communication between the principal and the student body. The goal here is to enhance the role of the student council as a link between the students and the administration. (item 19)
5. Home room representatives should communicate to their home rooms better. Minutes of the council meetings should be read in each home room. Issues that were brought up at the council should be discussed. This would perhaps open up lines of communication and make information on council activities more readily available. (item 10)

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The student body should be polled frequently in order to solicit their opinions on various issues. (item 17)
7. Some information on the activities of the student council should be included in the Student Handbook given to incoming fifth and sixth graders. (items 15-25)
8. The council and the advisor should initiate an investigation in order to find out why so few seventh and eighth graders are pleased with the activities of the council. After this survey is completed corrective action can be taken. It is not known what action can be taken at this point. (item 3)
9. The council and the advisor should investigate to see why so many more seventh and eighth grade students than fifth and sixth believe that the faculty is apathetic towards the council. When these reasons are discovered, corrective action can then be initiated. (item 27)
10. The council should ask the principal why he does not want them involved in the decision making process. (item 12)

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APPENDIX

SURVEY

STATEMENTS ABOUT STUDENT GOVERNMENT

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1. Student Council is important?			
2. Our student council deals with important issues.			
3. I am satisfied with our student council.			
4. The faculty and administration take council decisions seriously.			
5. I am interested in council activities.			
6. The student council meets frequently enough.			
7. The student council should meet during school hours.			
8. The student council should meet either before or after school.			
9. Homeroom representatives should receive credits for being on the student council.			
10. Information on council activities is adequate.			
11. Students at our school are involved in the decision making process.			
12. The principal wants students involved in the decision making.			
13. The superintendent wants students involved in the decision making.			
14. The Board of Education wants students involved in the decision making.			

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SURVEY

STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
15. Don't Know.			
16. Plans school fund raising activities.			
17. Solicits student's opinions.			
18. Sponsors assembly programs.			
19. Serves as link between students and administrators.			
20. Gives to charities.			
21. Sponsors school newspaper.			
22. Participates in student exchange program.			
23. Assists faculty i.e. monitors, ushers, etc.			
24. Plans year book.			
25. Purchases needed items for the school, i.e. flag.			
26. Nothing			

00045

SURVEY

PROBLEMS STATED AS OBSTACLES TO STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
27. Teacher Apathy.			
28. Principal's Apathy.			
29. Student's Apathy			
30. Poor channels of communication.			
31. Superintendent.			
32. Board of Education.			
33. Inefficient Student Council.			
34. Lack of Student assemblies.			
35. Large enrollment.			
36. Lack of extra teacher time to work with students.			

Survey is modeled after article: "Student Involvement" produced by the Department of Research and Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia, 1973.

00046

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00047

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ADDENDUM

The following recommendations were accepted by the principal and the student council.

1. A meeting time was agreed upon, 11:30 A.M.
2. A memo was prepared and distributed
3. A priority rank order is given to issues before the council. The officers of the council are charged with this responsibility.
4. A meeting between the principal and the student council president is held every other Tuesday.
5. Minutes of the council meetings are being read in every homeroom.
6. In the planning stage.
7. Information on council activities will be placed in next years student handbook.
8. In the planning stage.
9. In the planning stage.

Recommendation ten was accepted by the council but rejected by the principal. He does not wish to discuss with them the role of students in the decision making process in schools.

The position of faculty advisor to the student council was abolished in all middle schools and the high school. The Board of Education, in contract negotiations with the local teachers union refused to offer monetary compensation for the position. They assigned the duties of the advisor to the principals of each respective building. The teachers negotiations committee accepted this clause in the contract despite

much opposition. Their reasoning was that they had to give ground on this issue in order to achieve agreement on other parts of the contract they deemed "more important".